

Seyfarth Shaw and Uptown People’s Law Center File Class Action Against Illinois Prison System

Pro bono complaint alleges a systematic lack of adequate medical care

CHICAGO (October 24, 2011) — Leading law firm Seyfarth Shaw LLP and the Uptown People’s Law Center, a legal aid organization, have filed a class action lawsuit in the Northern District of Illinois against the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), alleging widespread and persistent mistreatment of inmates needing ongoing medical attention.

The case is brought on behalf of plaintiff Donald Lippert, a diabetic prisoner incarcerated in the Statesville Correctional Center, and all inmates with serious medical conditions who are continually denied treatment.

Examples of mistreatment cited in the complaint include: conditions that are often misdiagnosed, if screened at all; medication being delayed, if given at all; and patients that are not permitted to see a doctor until they are in such severe pain or their condition has deteriorated to such an extent that emergency action needs to be taken.

The complaint states that lack of treatment goes beyond the indifference of specific medical personnel and is the consequence of overarching policies and procedures put in place and executed by the IDOC and Wexford Health, which manages health care services for the prison system. The complaint alleges that, among other things, policies and procedures limit the resources and staff necessary to adequately treat inmates.

“This complaint is brought with the aim of redressing, once and for all, these problematic policies that have caused and continue to cause a systemic failure in the provision of adequate medical care to Illinois inmates,” said Jason Stiehl, the Seyfarth litigation partner handling the case.

Seyfarth attorney Kristine Rinella Argentine, who did much of the work on the complaint, added, “The relationship between IDOC and Wexford is in deliberate indifference to inmates’ medical care.”

Allan Mills, legal director for Uptown People’s Law Center, added complaints about medical care in the Illinois prison system are one of the most frequent types of letters his organization receives. “These cases are also some of the most difficult to place with pro bono attorneys, as each case requires an expert to evaluate the medical records,” Mills said. “By bringing a class action, we allege that problems go beyond a failure to treat individual prisoners, but are instead systemic.”

The Uptown People’s Law Center represents poor and working people living in Uptown Chicago and other similar communities. The Law Center’s biggest areas of practice are landlord-tenant, Social Security disability, and public benefits. In addition, the Law Center represents prisoners seeking to challenge the way they are treated in prison.

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